

Prepare Today for Tomorrow's Disaster

Summer brings the warming of Atlantic waters that spawns tropical storms, many of which will develop into hurricanes. Hurricane season runs from June through November with the storms typically becoming more frequent and more powerful toward the end of the season. However, that does not mean we can be lulled by the lazy, hazy days of summer. Hurricane Allison gave us an object lesson that even early season storms can be devastating.

The best time to begin preparations for a hurricane is long before one approaches. There are things to buy, plans to make and habits to develop to give you a head start when a hurricane warning comes.



PURCHASES to Consider

- **S.A.M.E. Radio or NOAA Weather Radio** – The S.A.M.E. (Specific Area Message Encoder) radio is a digital weather and all hazards alert monitor with specific area message encoder that replaces the old emergency weather broadcasts. It automatically "wakes up" and alerts of emergency broadcast information. During a power outage, it will use less power than a television, and it is the only source of direct emergency information of all types. They cost under \$50 at most stores; check the big retail outlets first. Buy the required batteries for power backup, typically nine volt and get extras. National Weather Service radio frequencies range from 162.400 MHz to 162.550 MHz in 0.025 MHz increments. Check the radio frequency for your location at: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/sc/slsc.htm> National Weather Service radio frequency for the greater Columbia area: 162.400 MHz.
- **Battery-Operated TV** – A battery-operated television will give you access to emergency information broadcasts while the power is out, which may be an extended period if your area suffers a direct hit from the hurricane or from any of the tornados typically spawned in a hurricane. Make sure to get spare batteries and during a disaster, limit its use to viewing emergency information only.
- **Power Generator** – A power generator is a necessity if someone depends on a power-driven medical aid such as a compressor that drives an inhalation unit. Acquire the fuel and check the supply regularly. Limit the generator's power use to critical needs and remember that disasters can cause extended periods of power outages.
- **DC to AC Power Inverter** – Buy the largest you can afford. A 600W minimum with battery low shutdown allows you to run a few electrical devices like a radio, television and some lights from your car battery (or other stand-alone batteries). Most are not big enough for ceramic or other heaters, or even furnace fans. Get the Watt requirements of most common household appliances at <http://www.nbpower.com/en/commitment/safety/safety.aspx> Or go to www.Google.com and search for "power requirements for household appliances" (without the quotes). When the battery gets low, just crank up the car and recharge the battery while operating your converter. It gives you days of critical needed power. This is especially important if you have critical electrical needs for medical or other needs. This can be a life-saver, literally, if you are required to evacuate your area. The inverter costs under \$150 depending on size.
- **Spare Gas Containers** – Purchase only containers that are designed to store gas and keep them full. Also, you will need a funnel that fits into your vehicle's gas tank access. How much spare gas you need depends on your vehicle's gas mileage when fully loaded and how far you will need to travel if your area is evacuated or if you must relocate. Remember that gas station pumps will not operate during a power outage.

- **Basic (old fashioned) Telephone** – Any telephone that plugs into an electric socket as well as the telephone socket (cordless telephones, answering machine) will not operate during an electrical outage. Basic telephones which plug into the telephone socket only (i.e. they have no power plug) will; there is sufficient power on the telephone line itself to operate this kind of telephone. They cost about \$6 in most stores.
- **Propane Heater and Full Propane Tank** – The propane heater throws off a tremendous amount of heat in any environment and some consider them safer than kerosene heaters. Like kerosene heaters, they're not recommended for indoor use because they will consume all of the oxygen in well insulated smaller areas. You probably already have the propane tank for your barbecue grill. Fill it up. Or go rent a full one from almost any convenience store.
- **Emergency Tool Kit** – Assemble these emergency tools and keep them in an easily retrievable place; store in an easy-to-carry box in case you have to evacuate or relocate:

☒ duct and masking tape

☒ garbage bags

☒ plastic sheeting

☒ shovel (multiple uses, and also if a make-shift latrine must be built)

☒ hammer and nails

☒ wrenches and pliers (to shut off connections, e.g. gas pipelines)

☒ string or cord and scissors

☒ paper and pens or pencils (to write down emergency information, write messages, etc.)

- **Laptop Battery and Car Lighter Power Adapter** – Keep your laptop battery charged and remember to take backups of your data regularly.
- **Spare Cell Phone Battery and Car Lighter Power Adapter** – Keep in mind that in an emergency your cell phone may not operate. You may get rapid busy or no dial tone. Also, the U.S. is implementing prioritized call handling which means that first responders and emergency services have first priority on usage.
- **Fire Extinguishers and Battery Operated Smoke Alarms** – Keep fire extinguishers in ready reach: in the kitchen, garage, laundry room, near fireplaces, near entertainment centers, computer equipment or other places with concentrations of electrical equipment. Make sure everyone knows how to operate the fire extinguishers in your home. Consider installing battery-operated smoke alarms which will work when the power is off and check the batteries yearly on an anniversary date, e.g. every New Year's Day.

PLANS to Make

- **Plan an Evacuation Destination and At Least One Alternate** – Research routes, including alternate routes. Collect together (or purchase) local, county and city maps to assist in getting out of a stricken area. Remember that bridges are especially susceptible to damage from disasters.
- **Have a "Connect Up" Plan with Family Members** – Know what your schools' evacuation plans are. Know where and how to get your school children. Be sure the school has an up-to-date list of adults that may pick up your children.

- **Make a List of Battery Requirements** – Make a list of all appliances that can use batteries, which type of batteries they use and how many. When warned of a disaster, this list will allow you to quickly know what batteries you should purchase.
- **Keep an Old Cell Phone Handy** (even if you do not have current cell phone service) – By law, all cellular phones must be able to dial 911 even when not actively subscribed to a service. Put an extra in the trunk of your car along with the car lighter adapter or AC power adapter.
- **Collect/List Valuables** – Collect together all valuables you will need to take if you have to evacuate the area or relocate because of damage to your home. If you would rather make a list to collect the items at the approach of a hurricane, make a note of the items' locations. Include all important papers, insurance policies, safe deposit box keys, irreplaceable pictures, pin numbers and address/telephone information for relatives, insurance agencies, credit card companies and others you may need to contact. Put all items in a waterproof bag that is easy to carry.
- **Plan to Secure Your Property** – Install storm shutters or purchase and store window storm covers or plywood (these are often in short supply and may be expensive to purchase when a disaster looms). Keep masking tape on hand; then, if you can't cover the windows, tape them to reduce shattering (tape regular size windows in an "X"; use multiple cross strips on very large windows). Plan how you will (and purchase the materials to) securely tie down outdoor items (lawn furniture, antennas, satellite dishes, etc.) that can't be brought indoors.
- **Prepare Today** – Use the Internet for information – Look up any needed information such as wattage requirements of household appliances, how to purify water using bleach, etc. Expect that the Internet will not be available for prolonged periods because of cyber attacks. Visiting the following sites today and print appropriate material:
<http://www.nbpower.com/en/commitment/safety/safety.aspx>
<http://www.metrokc.gov/prepare/default.aspx>
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030207-10.html>

HABITS to Develop

- **Prescriptions, OTC Medicines and First-Aid Supplies** – Get in the habit of refilling prescriptions before they run out. Keep over-the-counter medicines stocked and current – check expiration dates. Keep fully supplied first-aid kits at home and in all cars. Purchase extra batteries for medical aids, e.g. hearing aids.
- **Fill Up When Gas Reaches Half Full** – Get in the habit of refilling the gas tank when it reaches half full. Every car in your household should be as full of gas as reasonable and possible; also fill gas containers (those designed for gas) and refuel motorbikes, motorized bicycles and other vehicles. Not only will this help make sure you don't run out of gas, but in an accident it's the gas fumes that are highly explosive. Motor boats may be lifesavers in a flood.
- **Lighting** – Keep a supply of flashlights with extra batteries, candles, lighters and matches. To use candles, light the candle and drip a bit of wax onto the center of a saucer and immediately anchor the base of the candle into the cooling wax drip. Do not let young children use candles unsupervised.
- **Take Data Backups** – Set up a program to take regular backups of home computer data or other electronic storage. At work, data on networked drives is probably backed up regularly – check with the information technology department for the backup schedule. If data is stored on a workstation hard drive (usually the C: drive), then the data is not backed up with the server data. Hard drive data must be backed up separately, and make sure to take the backups off site.
- **The Clear Desk Habit** – Get in the habit of clearing off your desk when you leave. Hurricanes structurally damage buildings but more offices suffer severe business damage from the paperwork lost due to broken windows. Through broken windows, high winds can capture all kinds of debris, especially paper, and hurl these projectiles at great

force, and heavy rain can soak the building interior. Fire is another event where broken windows and water damage are common. Protect important papers by stowing them in drawers and cabinets, or place them in binders stored on shelves making sure the shelf is full so there is no room for the binders to be easily lifted by wind. Snugly stored binders also resist movement in low level earthquakes.

- **Keep Food Pantry Stocked** – Keep plenty of food on hand, especially nonperishable items, and ready-to-eat foods which do not require cooking or the addition of water. Purchase a hand-operated (non-electric) can opener. Stock several cans of Sterno (solid heating fuel that comes in cans suitable for use under chafing dishes and fondue pots).
- **Stock Plenty of Water for Drinking and Other Purposes** – People need to drink an average of one gallon of water a day. During a minor disaster, water supplies can be disrupted for three to seven days; longer, in a major disaster especially if a large region is affected. Sports drinks also balance electrolytes. Buy and keep bottled drinking water on hand. When storing tap water, use purified containers such as those which once contained purchased drinking water and fill containers with tap water ahead of time. Also, store water for other needs such as washing and flushing toilets. At disaster onset, fill bathtubs.

If you have other tips you'd like to contribute, please send them to:

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